

A T E X A S L E G E N D.

By STEPHEN CRANE.

"REMEMBER that time, Major?"

said the railroad man.

"You bet I do," rejoined the Major.

"Go ahead and tell it," said the others.

The Major lifted his glass, and carefully scrutinised the bright liquid.

Well, Tom's line, you see, was just being put through the interior of the State at that time, and one day he asked me to go out with him to some little town which he was going to open up with an auction sale of lots, and beer and sandwiches for the people, and all that, you know. Well, I went along, and there was a big freight-car loaded down with kegs and provisions. Everybody was having a great time. Tom got ill during the sale, so he went into a little shanty to lie down, while I went over to the freight-car to get some ice to put on his head. I was in the car, scouting around after ice, when, all of a sudden, someone slammed the door to, and made the inside of the car as dark as pitch. Then somebody in the darkness began to swear like a pirate, and I heard him swing his revolver loose. I began to see the game then.

It seems that there was a fellow around there that a good many people wanted to kill, and they said they were going to kill him that day at the sale, too. Somebody had pointed him out to me during the morning, and I had heard him brag, so I recognised this voice in the darkness. I think he decided they slammed the door on him so that when he opened it to come out they could get a good fair chance to make a sieve of him. The way that man swore was positively frightful. He wasn't very good company, either. I stood still so long that I felt the bones in my legs' creak like old timbers, and I didn't breathe any harder than a canary-bird. He went on swearing at a great rate. I began to think of Tom and his pain, wishing that he had died rather than I had come for that ice.

At last I found that I had got to move. There was no help for it. My legs refused to support me in this position any longer. My head was growing dizzy, and if I

didn't change my attitude I would fall down. I hadn't remained motionless for so very long either, but in a darkness where a man can't tell whether he is standing on his feet or his ears, the faculty of balance isn't much to be counted on. My heart stopped short when I felt myself sway, but I shifted one foot quickly, and there I was again. But that accursed foot had made a squeak.

The fellow listened for a moment, and then he yelled: "Who the hell is in here?"

I didn't say a word, but just dropped down to the floor as easy as a sack of oats.

He listened for a time, and then bellowed out again: "Who's in here?" I suppose that he figured that it wa'n't one of his enemies, or they would have got him while he was swearing to himself over in the corner.

"Who's in here, by Gawd! Come along now, galoot, an' speak up er I'll begin t' bore leetle holes in yeh! Who er yer, anyhow? Whistle some, now, by Gawd, er I'll fair eat yeh!"

He was beginning to get mad as a wild cat. I could fairly hear that fellow lashing himself into a rage, and getting more crazy every minute. All the kegs were up in his corner, and when I felt around with one hand I couldn't find a thing to get behind. Every second I expected to hear him begin to work his gun, and if you have ever lain in the darkness and wondered at what precise spot the impending bullet would strike, you know how I felt. So when he yelled out again, "Who er yeh?" I spoke up and said, "It's only me."

"Thunder!" cried he, in a roar like a bull, "Who's me! Give yer hull damn name an' pedigree, Mister, if yeh ain't fond of a reg'lar howling, helling row!"

"I'm from Houston," said I.

"Houston," said he, with a snort. "An' what er yeh doin' here, stranger?"

"I came out to the sale," I told him.

"Hum," said he; and then he remained still for some time over in his end of the car.



"LET 'ER GO." HE SAID.

I was congratulating myself that I ran no more chance of trouble with this fiend, and that the whole thing was now a mere matter of waiting for some merciful fate to let me out, when suddenly the fellow said, "Mister!"

"Sir," said I.

"Open that there door!"

"I'r—what?"

"Open that there door!"

"Er—the door to the car?"

He began to froth at the mouth, I think. "Sure!" he roared. "Th' door t' th' car! There hain't fifty doors here, be ther! Slid'er open, or else, Mister, you be a goner, sure." And then he cursed my ancestors for fifteen generations.

"Well—but—look here," said I. "Ain't—look here—ain't they going to shoot as soon as anybody opens that door? It——"

"None 'a yer damned business, stranger!" the fellow howled. "Open that there door, er I'll everlastin'ly make er ventilator of yer. Come on, now. Step up." He began to prowl over in my direction. "Where are yeh? Come on now, galoot. Where are yeh? Oh, jest lemme lay my ol' gun ag'in yeh, an' I'll fin' out! Step up."

This cat-like approach in the darkness was too much for me. "Hold on," said I; "I'll open the door."

He gave a grunt and paused. I got up and went over to the door.

"Now, stranger," the fellow said, "es soon es yeh open the door jest step erside an' watch Luke Burnham peel th' skin off a' them skunks."

"But, look here——" said I.

"Stranger, this haint no time t' arger! Open th' door!"

I put my hand on the door and prepared to slide my body along with it. I had hoped to find it locked, but unfortunately it was not. When I gave it a preliminary shake it rattled easily, and I could see that there was going to be no trouble in opening the door.

I turned toward the interior of the car for one last remonstrance. "Say, I haven't got anything to do with this thing. I'm just up here from Houston to go to the sale——"

But the fellow howled again: "Stranger, er you makin' a damn fool a' me! By the——"

"Hold on," said I. "I'll open the door."

I got all prepared, and then turned my head. "Are you ready?"

"Let'er go."

He was standing back in the car. I could see the dull glint of the revolvers in each hand.

"Let'er go," he said again.

I braced myself and put one hand out to reach the end of the door; then, with a groan, I pulled. The door slid open, and I fell on my hands and knees in the end of the car.

"Hell!" said the fellow. I turned my head. There was nothing to be seen but blue sky and green prairie and the little group of yellow board shanties with a red auction flag and a crowd of people in front of one of them.

The fellow swore and flung himself out of the car. He went prowling off toward the crowd, with his guns held barrels down and his nervous fingers on the triggers. I followed him at a respectful distance.

As he came near to them he began to walk like a cat on wet pavements, lifting each leg a way up. "Where is he? Where is th' white-livered skunk what slammed the door on me? Where is he? Where is he? Let'im show hisself! He dasset! Where is he? Where is he?"

He went among them, bellowing in his bull fashion, and not a man moyed. "Where's all these galoots what was goin' t' shoot at me? Where be they? Let'em come! Let'em show thei'selves! Let'em come at me! Oh, ther's them here as has got guns hangin' to'em; but let'em pull'em! Let'em pull onc't! Jest let'em tap'em with their fingers, an' I'll drive a stove-hole through every last one 'a their low-down hides! Lessee a man pull a gun! Lessee! An' lessee th' man what slammed th' door on me! Let'im projuce hisself, th' ——" And he cursed this unknown individual in language that was like black smoke.

But the men with guns remained silent and grave. The crowd for the most part gave him room enough to pitch a circus tent. When the train left, he was still roaring after the man who had slammed the door.

"And so they didn't kill him, after all?" said someone at the end of the narrative.

"Oh, yes, they got him that night," said the Major. "In a saloon somewhere. They got him all right."